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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 004059

SIPDIS

NEA/ENA PLEASE PASS TO TRIPOLI

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SUBJECT: TRIPOLI ROLLS OUT THE RED CARPET FOR  
ITALIAN-LIBYAN JEWS

REF: ROME 3911

Classified By: POLITICAL MINISTER-COUNSELOR TOM COUNTRYMAN, 1.4 (b)(d)

1. (C) Summary: The delegation of Italian-Libyan Jews who visited Tripoli October 10-14 described their trip as a success and were jubilant at having seen and been welcomed in their homeland. The trip provided the Libyans with an opportunity to evaluate their visitors; the group did not meet with Qadhafi or his sons but saw the Foreign Minister and the Secretary General for Foreign Affairs of the General People's Congress. They were offered promises of renewed citizenship and encouraged to invest and visit, but actual compensation was not discussed. The group expects to return in late November after the end of Ramadan for more discussions. End summary.

2. (C) The delegation of Italian-Libyan Jews who visited Tripoli October 10-14 at the invitation of Qadhafi's son Sa'adi provided the Embassy with a readout of what they described as a very successful visit. The Libyans gave the group the red carpet treatment, including lavish hotel suites and meals.

3. (C) According to Shalom Tesciuba, the leader of the delegation, they first paid a courtesy call on FM Abdelrahman Shalgham, who stressed Libya's desire to return to the fold of brotherly nations. He probed the group for their views on Palestine, Afghanistan and Iraq but avoided polemics.

4. (C) During a meeting with Suleiman Shahoumi, Secretary General for Foreign Affairs at the General People's Congress, former Libyan Ambassador to Rome al-Obeidi (now in Qadhafi's personal office), and Mohammad Zwayy, Libyan Ambassador to the UK, discussions centered on offers of citizenship, tourism and commerce. Shahoumi told the group they were welcome to return and reclaim their citizenship without losing their Italian citizenship. He indicated that wives and children not born in Libya could also expect to receive citizenship. Family members who did not want to claim citizenship would be welcome to visit Libya's ruins, hotels and beaches. These offers, Shahoumi said, also applied to Libyan Jews who had fled to the U.S., UK, France, etc. When the group asked about their actual certificates of citizenship, however, Shahoumi indicated that it could be discussed further after Ramadan. Shahoumi also urged the group to invest and establish commercial enterprises and even offered some financial assistance and privileges, although what kind of privileges remained unclear.

5. (C) The group had hoped for a meeting with Qadhafi, but at the last moment, al-Obeidi sent the Colonel's regrets saying that he had too many prior appointments. They did not see either Saif or Sa'adi Qadhafi.

6. (C) The group also visited the old city and the old Jewish community, including a 14th Century synagogue now in tatters without a ceiling. Sadly, the Jewish cemetery is gone, and a luxury complex has been built on its former site. They were told there are 44 synagogues throughout Libya and there was some discussion of the need for renovations. In visiting the old city, several of the group broke down in tears upon seeing their former homes. Still, as a whole the group was elated over their ability to return. They spoke Arabic with people in the streets and the suqs and described everyone as friendly and welcoming. At a restaurant where the MFA had arranged a lavish meal, they said the owner initially had been unsure of how to act because he had never seen or spoken to a Jewish person, but he ended up calling them brothers.

7. (C) There was no specific discussion of compensation for seized monies or property. The next step will be a return trip, probably around November 20-22 for the same delegation. They may consider also bringing lawyers or specialists to help evaluate property, but first they will discuss the trip with their community. They thought there would be a possibility for American-Libyans to visit as well. They planned to brief the Israeli Ambassador to Rome this week and have already briefed their sister community in New York. The group will also meet with Congressman Tom Lantos November 6 when he visits Rome en route to Tripoli.

18. (C) Comment: Clearly, the Libyans saw the trip as a way to evaluate the group before extending any commitments. Tesciuba felt that the signals they received were excellent and believed the Libyan offers were credible and fully worth further exploration. Overall, the group was jubilant at having seen and been welcomed in their homeland. Both sides understand that any offers of compensation will require extensive negotiations, and the group continued to believe that U.S. recognition of the Libyan initiative would be

important to its eventual success.

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